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ABSTRACT

Creating Self-Portraits is an individual and/or group career development tool designed to assess without testing. Researchers have found that testing can be counter-productive; once clients were labelled, they frequently stopped self-examination. A tool was needed that would help people understand themselves in a way that would encourage further self-exploration in a detailed and broad manner, and in a way which accommodated change over time. Creating Self-Portraits guides clients in self-examination using four aspects: (1) Meaning (values, beliefs, interests, and barriers to meaning); (2) Outcomes (the components of a dream or future vision); (3) Activities (including preferred, past, and needed); and (4) Tools/techniques (including skills, knowledge, and attitudes). A semi-structured interview format is used to explore each area. Responses are laid out in four columns on a large sheet of paper. Each aspect is carefully analyzed so that items of fundamental importance are uncovered. Rigorous evaluations of Creating Self-Portraits have not yet been completed. However, clients report that they enjoy and feel motivated by the process. The self-portrait is a living document that keeps pace with the client's changing perceptions of self, and, as such, provides a blueprint for career-planning. (RJM)

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Creating Self-Portraits: ERIC Digest.

EDO-CG-95-70

by Dave E. Redekopp, Barrie Day & Kris Magnusson

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ERIC DIGEST

1995 EDO-CG-95-70

Creating Self–Portraits

Dave E. Redekopp, Barrie Day & Kris Magnusson

Overview

Creating Self–Portraits (Redekopp, Day, Magnusson, & Durnford, 1993) is an individual and/or group career development tool designed to assess without testing. While adopting a developmental approach (e.g., Gelatt, 1989; Magnusson, 1990; Super, 1985) to career assistance, it became apparent that testing was often counter–productive. Rather than helping clients "know themselves," tests frequently abdicated clients from their self–examination responsibilities. Tests provided clients with labels (e.g., ENTJ, RIA, learning disabled, blue, analytic); once labeled, clients felt no need to further self– analyze. This result was particularly troublesome because the labels were not all–inclusive; they encapsulated only one component of the person's being (e.g., interests, aptitudes). Obtaining a classification of only one part of themselves (such as interests), clients had a tendency to stop exploring other aspects (such as values).

The self–discovery barrier was not the only difficulty with tests. A large number of tests also prevented an open exploration of the world of work. Clients were looking to tests to discover "what they should be," and they displayed a strong tendency to believe—often blindly—the test results. To dissuade them of these rigid beliefs, it was pointed out that tests can provide only a sample of possible occupations and that further exploration was necessary. After some time, questions arose as to the usefulness of using methods that had to be disqualified.

The above problems would not have been so troublesome if clients and the labor market stood still. New occupational roles were (and still are) emerging almost daily and existing roles were (and still are) changing daily. Clients, too, were changing. "Technophobes" learn to love computers as they acquired the necessary skills; employees blossom into entrepreneurs; and academics become avid marketers when exposed to the appropriate mentors. The labor market was becoming a "work dynamic" (Redekopp, Fiske, Lemon, & Garber–Conrad, 1994) in which clients were able to participate once they were provided with meaningful developmental experiences. It was found that the tests that matched traits with occupations were inadvertently arresting clients' development with regards to seeing their own development and the changing nature of work.

Some of these problems were resolved in the same way other career development practitioners have been doing for years: by taking a considerable amount of time to explain to clients the theories behind the specific tests, the difficulties of test construction, the specific meanings of test terminology, and the limitations of test results.

A tool was needed that would help people understand themselves (a) in a way that would encourage further self–exploration; (b) in a detailed and broad manner (i.e., including many parts of the self, each part being examined comprehensively),(c) in a way which accommodated change over time; (d) without labels, classifications, or taxonomies;(e) using their own terminology rather than borrowing terminology; (f) in a way that did not link the individual's self–exploration with an occupational role or set of occupational roles (i.e., divergence promoting rather than convergence promoting).

Description

Creating Self–Portraits is a simple method that assists clients to examine themselves from four aspects:

1. Meaning (values, beliefs, interests, and barriers to meaning)

2. Outcomes (the components of a dream or future vision)

3. Activities (including preferred, past, and needed)

4 Tools/techniques (including skills, knowledge, personal characteristics, and attitudes)

A semi-structured interview format is used to explore each area. It may be conducted in an individual or group setting and usually lasts one to three sessions. (For details, see Redekopp et al., 1993.) The responses are laid out in four columns on a large (17" x 22") sheet of paper. A partially completed Self–Portrait is shown below:

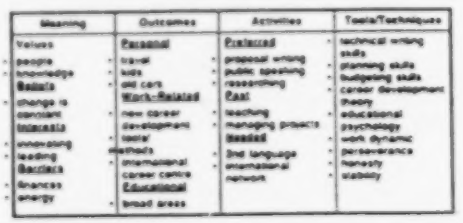

Figure 1. Partial Self-Portrait

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Meaning

The "values" portion of the "meaning" column is intended to capture items of fundamental importantance to the client. These are neither right nor wrong; they are simply important. Values are the client's enduring motivators. The "beliefs" component attempts to identify elements of the client's world view. These include opinions about self (e.g., "I'm not very smart."), conduct (e.g., "A stitch in time saves nine.") and the world (e.g., "There are no jobs.") Beliefs guide the client's approach to fulfilling values. Some may need to be changed if the client is to move towards his or her outcomes. The "interests" section captures events that the person enjoys. The interests need not be valuable (e.g., one can value children without being interested in working with children) or in conformity with belief systems they are just fun and enjoyable. "Barriers" are conditions that prevent meaning from being fulfilled. These are often the "yes, buts" of counseling sessions (e.g., "Yes, I'd love to find work, but there are no jobs.").

Outcomes

The "outcomes" segment describes the person's dream or vision. The "dream" is the individual's conception of a preferred future, a broad description of what life would be like if everything went the person's way. The intention here is to list features of the "best of all worlds" for the client, regardless of the realism of these features. "Personal" outcomes comprise the hopes and aspirations for non-work achievements (e.g., living on an acreage, being healthy). The "work-related" outcomes section delineates the ideal accomplishments that the person sees being met through work (recognizing that the personal/work distinction is rather arbitrary). The "educational" outcomes address the person's desired learning achievements.

Activities

Within the "activities" column, "preferred activities" extend the dream by portraying what the person wishes to do on a day-to-day basis. "Past activities" include virtually everything the person has done in the past that he or she wishes to record. This may range from "repair cars" to "break and enter" to "negotiate bargaining agreements." "Needed activities" are those actions the person should take to start moving towards the dream. In some cases, these will include "strengthen the dream" for clients who have had little opportunity to do so. In other cases, where the dream is well established, these activities may be very focused (e.g., develop database programming skills).

Tools/Techniques

The "tools/techniques" column lists all the skills, knowledge, attitudes and personal characteristics that the person has used in "past activities." For example, to "break and enter," one needs planning skills, knowledge of security systems, a preference for risk (attitude) and cool-headedness (personal characteristic).

Conclusion

Rigorous evaluations of Creating Self-Portraits have not yet been completed. However, clients report that they enjoy and feel morivated by the process. They feel less pressure to make the right "big decision," they understand themselves better and they become more flexible/adaptable. The self-portrait is a living document that keeps pace with the client's changing perceptions of self and, as such, it provides a blueprint for exploration and/or other career-planning processes. More importantly, clients who use self-portraits report making life and work choices that are meaningful and that have enduring value. Creating Self-Portraits seems to enable them to "follow their hearts" (i.e., dream) and "focus on their journeys" while doing so. (See Redekopp, Day, & Robb, 1995).

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